

9 March 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Comments on The Conduct and Misconduct of Foreign Affairs by Ambassador Charles W. Yost

1. This memorandum is to invite your attention to a recently published book, The Conduct and Misconduct of Foreign Affairs by Ambassador Charles W. Yost (New York: Random House). In summary, Yost urges the primacy of the Secretary of State and the Foreign Service in foreign affairs. He disapproves of the role of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and the NSC mechanism. Yost is basically opposed to CIA and Defense Department intelligence activities in collection, research and analysis, feeling that most of it can be accomplished better by State's professionals and that NSA material is virtually worthless. He would restrict clandestine collection largely to technological matters and the deployment of weapons. He favors a seventy five percent reduction in CIA's political and economic reporting, analysis and covert operations, placing analysis and evaluation in State.

2. More detailed comments and some pertinent quotations from Ambassador Yost's book are attached.

STATINTL

Walter Pfofzheimer  
Curator

Historical Intelligence Collection

-2-

SUBJECT: Comments on The Conduct and Misconduct of  
Foreign Affairs by Ambassador Charles W. Yost

Distribution:

Orig & 1 w/book - DCI  
1 w/book - DDCI  
1 - Asst. to Dir. (Mr. Thuermer)  
1 - DCI/IC  
1 - DDI  
1 - DDO  
1 - DDS (Att: Mr. Wattles)  
1 - OGC  
1 - LC  
1 - IG  
1 - D/ONE  
1 - D/OTR  
1 - D/OCI  
1 - D/Sec. (Att: [redacted]) STATINTL  
1 - CI Staff (Att: [redacted]) STATINTL  
1 - CA Staff (Att: [redacted])  
1 - Chief, FI Staff (Att: [redacted]) STATINTL  
2 - HIC

Attachment: Comments on The Conduct and Misconduct of Foreign Affairs by Ambassador Charles W. Yost

1. Ambassador Charles W. Yost joined the Foreign Service in 1930 and retired in 1971 with the rank of Career Ambassador, having served the last two years of his career as the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

2. A major theme of Ambassador Yost's new book is that all foreign affairs should be staffed by the Department of State, which, in his view, is best equipped to handle such matters. He deplores the roles of the military, the Intelligence Community, and the White House staff in foreign affairs, not only because of their inflated size but also because of his opinion of their ineptness in comparison to the professional officers of the Department. Nor do Presidents of the United States escape Yost's notice:

"I do not find the record of these three Presidents [Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon] in the conduct of foreign affairs a brilliant one. ...[partly because of] their reluctance to heed advice from either experienced diplomats or more down-to-earth politicians..." (p. 140.)

3. Ambassador Yost feels that the National Security Council is a poor mechanism, and that decision making in foreign affairs "has become more and more entangled and distorted in the machinery of the Council." In his opinion, the growth of the power of the NSC and its staff in part has been a result of Presidential distrust of the State Department. (p. 142.) Yost has very little use for NSC papers which present the President with a series of "options" because he feels that they mislead the President. Yost also suspects that the "option" device was designed mainly to enable "the National Security Advisor, privately and without unseemly argument, to recommend to the President the option he prefers." (p. 144.) Further, he states that this whole procedure undermines the prestige and effectiveness of the Secretary of State and the Foreign Service in the conduct of day-to-day relations. In essence, Yost's conclusions about the NSC's mechanisms are that

"A President has no need to divide in order to rule. Overuse by the President of the Council and its staff reflects lack of confidence either in his principal minister or in himself." (p. 146.)

-2-

4. Ambassador Yost devotes a separate section (pp. 158-162) to his dislike of CIA and its activities. He admits that intelligence

"is extremely important, but except in regard to the technology and deployment of weapons, it can be acquired with modest diligence and without an elaborate covert apparatus." (p. 158.)

CPYRGHT

It is his view that most significant current intelligence is published in the press and that the policy maker is exposed to too much of an information overload by the incoming traffic. He feels that policy makers in international affairs can be adequately supplied by our embassies, properly staffed by experienced Foreign Service Officers; a smaller network of analytical and evaluating officers in Washington; and a network of private research institutes whose independent work is available to the government. Thus, to Yost, there is no need to add to the overseas establishment an intelligence apparatus with "transparent" cover, except in the weapons field. He admits that he himself, over the past quarter of a century, has been the recipient of "enormous help" from CIA but feels that nine tenths of the information which CIA collected could have been handled as well by an embassy properly staffed with State Department political officers. Furthermore, this could be done without the "stigma" on the embassies of attached covert personnel. The remaining ten percent could be collected by a smaller covert apparatus or dispensed with "without great loss." (p. 159.)

5. In addition, Yost does not think that communications intelligence in peacetime justifies the time, energy and funds expended. While Yost acknowledges that it would be useful to read the minutes of the Politburo, and that this would be worth the cost, he feels that ninety nine percent of the Comint take could be known or deduced from more legitimate sources. In a throwback to Secretary Stimson, Yost adds, "I have never felt entirely comfortable reading other people's mail." (p. 160.)

6. Turning to CIA's analysis and assessment work, Yost feels that a large part of "this soggy mass" could be better evaluated at the embassies without being sent to headquarters for evaluation at State and CIA. Moreover, he favors centralizing research and analysis on foreign affairs in State. In an apparent contradiction in Yost's thinking, he does believe that competing analyses

-3-

from State and CIA, should they reach the President, places too much of a burden upon the latter, as he is not equipped to judge in at least minor cases; but on the other hand, he feels differences of opinion among analysts in State should be reported candidly to the Secretary and the President. In his opinion "shrewder journalists were right about Vietnam more often than CIA, State, Defense and the White House" combined despite the intelligence available, and that "The lesson may be that one man with an open mind is worth a thousand with an obsession or predisposition." (p. 161.)

7. Ambassador Yost feels that covert operations should be used sparingly, and that indigenous forces, rather than CIA, were the decisive element in Iran and Guatemala. He adds that:

"It is only fair to conclude these disparaging remarks by noting that most of the faults in covert operations and intelligence here attributed to the CIA and other U.S. agencies are conscious imitations - often pale in comparison - of Soviet behavior and practice." (pp. 161-162.)

CPYRGHT

8. In making his recommendations "to avoid mismanagement of foreign affairs," Ambassador Yost proposes vastly reducing the size and scope of the intelligence activities of CIA and the Defense Department, while placing the responsibility for analysis and evaluation of all intelligence in the State Department and Foreign Service. He favors about a one third reduction in size of the State Department; a reduction of about three quarters of those parts of CIA engaged in political and economic reporting and analysis and in covert operations; and a similar three quarters reduction in the military attaches abroad. He concludes that the reductions in State should almost wholly be in the Washington staff,

"since Foreign Service field staffs of more or less present size may be required to take over the legitimate activities now being inappropriately performed by the CIA and other agencies." (p. 179.)

CPYRGHT